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IN Memoriam

JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE



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# In Memoriam

JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE

HARVARD CLUB  
OF NEW YORK CITY  
1917

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MINUTES  
OF THE  
BOARD OF MANAGERS  
MAY 23, 1917  
AND OF THE  
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
HARVARD CLUB OF NEW YORK CITY  
MAY 25, 1917



MINUTE  
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF MANAGERS OF THE  
HARVARD CLUB OF NEW YORK CITY  
MAY 23rd, 1917

*The Board of Managers, desiring to express in permanent form their deep sense of the great loss which has come to them by the death of their late associate and fellow member of the Club, JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE, of the Class of 1852, have, by vote at a regular meeting on the 23rd day of May, 1917, placed this minute on their record.*

Amidst the universal mourning for the orator, lawyer, diplomatist, statesman, citizen, we grieve for the loss of the loyal, loving son of Harvard. It is in that relationship, we feel sure, he would like to have us remember him. He never forgot it; the prizes of life that he won in such full measure were of higher worth in his eyes because of the glory they reflected upon his alma mater.

The ties which bound him to Harvard University and to the Harvard Club he never permitted to be loosened. He was President of the Harvard Club from 1874 to 1878 and from 1906 to 1908, and President Emeritus from 1913 until his death. Some of this Board remember him when he was a young man; none of us remember him when he was not a distinguished man, for distinction came to him early. But the recollection which all of us, old or young, will cherish of him is that of the last ten years of his life.

In 1907 he returned from the International Peace Conference at the Hague to which he had been a delegate. He had been the leader of the American Bar; he had been President of the Associations of the Bar of his city and country, of the Harvard Law

School Association, and of the New York Constitutional Convention of 1894. He had received from Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, St. Andrews, Yale, Amherst, Williams, their highest honorary degrees; and he had represented his country at the Court of St. James. The reputation which had preceded him to England as an eminent lawyer and a graceful speaker he had brilliantly sustained; and he had acquired in addition that of a diplomatist, a publicist and an orator who upon high and noble themes spoke with dignity and eloquence.

On coming back to New York he had intended to resume the practice of his profession with the second generation of his old firm, and for a time and to some extent he did; but he had become in the minds of the people a great public servant whom they were entitled to call upon as if he were the holder of high public office. He was sought after by members of his profession to adorn their gatherings; and by those citizens of New York who lead in movements to better the public and social life of their city and state, and by men and women all over the United States who wish their country in its conduct toward other countries to follow the path of honor and fair dealing, he was constantly asked to lend to the advancement of the causes they had at heart, the influence of his name, his pen and his voice. His interests and sympathies were so broad and far-reaching that they reinforced these demands upon him, and his life became a passing from one service to another. Among the few of his countless activities it may be noted that he was the President of the Union League Club, of the New England Society, of the Light House, an association to help the blind, the President of the State and County Bar Associations, the Vice-President of the Society for the Judicial Settlement of International Disputes, and a Trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

It was to this great and commanding figure that our Board always called on occasions at all out of the ordinary—when eminent men were our guests, when the Associated Harvard Clubs met in New York—and frequently in the ordinary life of the Club when fresh enthusiasm was to be aroused or devotion to Harvard or to country was to be fanned into a brighter flame: and the call was never in vain. He responded generously, joy-



ously and successfully. Everyone went home from a meeting at which he spoke with a warmer heart, a more courageous spirit and brighter hopes. Many told him so; and he knew therefore that he had accomplished what he wished, for his wish was always not that younger men should be awed or dazzled by him, but that they should like him and get from him something that would cheer and inspire them. That which made it easy for him to have his wish was the same thing which made it difficult for anyone to envy or belittle him. It was his kindness of heart and goodness of character. "Let his life be kindness, his conduct, righteousness, then in the fulness of gladness he will make an end of grief." He made an end of grief for himself, for he was a happy man, and for us too he made an end of grief whenever he was with us.

Lord Morley begins a chapter on the Last Years of the Life of Gladstone with these words of Dante:

"\* \* \* and the noble soul is like a good mariner, for he, when he draws near the port lowers his sails and enters it softly and with gentle steerage."

After Mr. Choate had lived fourscore years, such a picture must have pleased him as it passed now and then before his eyes. But surely never again after the invasion of Belgium, for from that moment he was a young man once more, not only in the amazing vigor but in the immense scope of the labor which he performed without cessation to the end; he had work to do and what might happen to him in the doing of it he did not care. That work was to help to arouse his country to the danger in which freedom was and her duty to help to save it. In the last weeks of his life he knew the work was done; for he saw America preparing a great army to fight for democracy, which without her aid he had feared would go down in ruins. He had never been happier, never more proud of America. She was once more the Goddess of his youth; and as he looked into her eyes, open now to all her dangers and all her duties, shining with the light of faith in the justice of her cause, she was to him as half a century ago to Lowell, "O, beautiful, my country."



MEMORIAL  
ADOPTED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE  
HARVARD CLUB OF NEW YORK CITY  
MAY 25th, 1917

*At the Annual Meeting of the Harvard Club of New York City held on the 25th day of May, 1917, Mr. Austen G. Fox, of the Class of 1869, presented the following memorial prepared at the request of the Board of Managers, and the Club directed that it be placed in their record.*

Joseph Hodges Choate, who died last week, was born at Salem, Mass., on January 24th, 1832, the son of George and Margaret Manning (Hodges) Choate. He graduated from Harvard College in 1852 with the degree of A. B., and from the Harvard Law School in 1854. He received the Honorary Degree of A. M. from Harvard in 1860, and the Honorary Degree of LL. D. in 1888. He also received the Honorary Degree of LL. D. from Amherst in 1887, Edinburgh, 1900, Cambridge, 1900, Yale, 1901, St. Andrew's, 1902, Glasgow, 1904, Williams, 1905, University of Pennsylvania, 1908, Union, 1909; and the degree of D. C. L. from Oxford in 1902.

He was admitted to the Bar in Massachusetts in 1855, and New York in 1856.

Mr. Choate was President of our Club from 1874 to 1878 and from 1906 to 1908. He was elected President-Emeritus of the Club May 17th, 1913, and continued President-Emeritus until his death. He had been President of the Harvard Alumni Association and of the Harvard Law School Association.

In the State Constitution Convention of 1894, he was its presiding officer. He was our Ambassador to the Court of St. James from 1899 to 1905, and represented us at the last Hague Conference. It is unnecessary to recite his many public services. Those which he rendered last give the key note of his life.

On Wednesday afternoon, May 9th, in welcoming the French Commissioners at the City Hall, Mr. Choate said :

“You have been fighting our battle every day \* \* \*.  
The sons of France are pouring out their blood like water  
that we and the other nations of the earth may enjoy  
liberty forever.”

On Friday evening at the Waldorf Astoria, the Mayor presented him in the following words :

“For the great citizenship of New York, we have asked  
but one to speak, the most respected, the most revered,  
the most loved of all New Yorkers, who, in his vigorous  
Americanism and fighting spirit, sets an inspiring ex-  
ample to the young men of America.”

For five consecutive days, he had been giving brilliant, exhausting service to his country and, apparently, had weathered the stress. No wonder that he had been advised that he might kill himself, and, no wonder, either, to those who knew him, that he kept on, to the end, “in noble scorn of consequence.”

To try to depict in words the traits that made Mr. Choate what he was is as vain a thing as to try to paint the changing lights and colors of the Northern sky.

M. Viviani speaking to our Bar of the soldiers of France and their cause, said :

“It is not for France, it is not for you ; it is not for England ;  
“it is not for Russia. No, it is not for these peoples ; it is for  
“the whole world ; it is for humanity itself. \* \* \*”

“To what end will it serve to plead private causes before  
“courts, if the great cause of humanity is not won by our arms,  
“by our soldiers?”

The day before he died Mr. Choate said to Mr. Balfour, who was leaving for Washington, “Remember we meet again to celebrate the victory.” Our tears of grief at our own loss in the death of our dear friend mingle with our tears of joy as we come together to honor the greatest victory of his victorious life—his final gift to the greatest of all his causes—the cause of humanity itself—Thus it is that our heart strings sound a note of exulta-

tion, like unto a great organ peal of triumph. He knew the peril of those arduous unflagging days, and nights, but he listened only to the "voice without reply

"Tis man's perdition to be safe  
"When for the truth he ought to die"—

He belonged not to the "unventurous throng," but was of that "ethereal mood

"That thanks the fates for their severer tasks

\* \* \* \* \*

"And, set in Danger's van, has all the boon it asks."

We hold with Lowell that,

"Life may be given in many ways  
And Loyalty to Truth be sealed,  
As bravely in the closet as the field  
So bountiful is Fate."

His was "such a dying as a god might envy, and a King pay half his ransom to make certain of."

Here, within the month his burning patriotism spoke to us in that unfaltering voice which yet "vibrates in our memory" and stirs us to be true to his audacious trust in our instant and unstinted service in the grand cause for which he risked and gave his life.

He has enshrined in the thoughts of men an unwritten memorial that surpasses all that we can write.

His message to us is told in the words of the dying soldier of a New York Regiment in the Civil War—"My work is done. Stand by that old flag. I gave my life for it, and I am glad to do it."

At a meeting held this week in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, the Archbishop of Canterbury said:

"The pure flame of what is straightforward in purpose and high toned in endeavor burned brightly. By God's help we are not going to let it flicker or wane."

Let us consecrate this hall to his memory, whom we must now emulate, and, in the exhortation of Pericles to the Men of Athens, "remembering that happiness is freedom, and that freedom is the high spirit, regard not the dangers of war." Let us take for our own the great motto of his life *Pro Re Publica*.

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